

The University of Chicago

THE URBANIZATION OF RURAL
RECREATION

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

1934

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EDWARD WILKERSON MONTGOMERY

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XI. CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter I wish to briefly summarize the important trends in rural recreation and to present a summary analysis of the process of urbanization as related to these trends.

TRENDS IN RURAL RECREATION

The important changes in rural recreation may be summarized under three headings: (1) the conditions imposed on rural recreation by the nature of farm work are a little less restrictive than formerly. (2) Improved communication has overcome, to a considerable degree, the limitations imposed on recreational organization by the sparsity of population. And (3) a beginning has been made in the development of an autonomous recreational organization.

(1) The use of rural leisure has been considerably restricted by the conditions of farm work. The length of the working day has reduced the amount of leisure and the fatigue from long hours has discouraged recreational activity at the end of the day. Furthermore, leisure has been more or less irregular and unpredictable, both because of the seasonal character of agricultural production and because of other less important interruptions to farm work. It has also been difficult for the farmer or his family to get away from the farm for more than a few hours at a time because of the care of live stock.

The introduction of machinery has in all probability reduced fatigue somewhat, but it does not appear that the amount of leisure has been noticeably increased, for the time-saving has been applied mainly to increasing production. The increased use

of mechanical power is also reducing somewhat the importance of the care of stock as a restriction on the use of leisure. Agriculture still remains a seasonal occupation with the periods of maximum leisure only roughly predictable, and with the periods of maximum leisure falling in the seasons least favorable for recreation. It is more than likely, however, that many of these restrictions imposed by the nature of farm work, particularly the length of the working day and the use of animals for power, are as much customary as inherent in agriculture, and being customary are in the slow process of being modified.

(2) The primary effect of the sparsity of population has been to prevent recreational specialization, two aspects of which may be noted particularly.

First, association for rural recreation has been based upon common residence rather than upon common interest or common status as in the city. So few people have been within the area of frequent contact that all persons living within this area have normally constituted a single recreational group. The family and the neighborhood thus became the important recreational units, since these have defined the important areas of contact in the rural community.

Secondly, the sparsity of population and the consequent infrequency of association made recreation more or less of a by-product of the other social activities of the community. Every occasion for association became an occasion for recreation. Thus, various forms of cooperative labor--the construction of buildings, corn-husking, harvesting, candle-making, quilting; activities associated with the religious life of the community--church attendance, special meetings and programs, and incidental activities such as church suppers; certain of the educational activities of

the community--"exercises," spelling-bees, box-suppers for raising money, all came to be of as much significance for recreation as for the ostensible primary purpose. On the other hand, there was little recreation that was independent of these other activities, practically all recreation being found as an incident to these non-recreational activities.

The most important changes in rural recreation fall in this class of phenomena. The family and the neighborhood are no longer as important as formerly as bases of recreational association; mere nearness is tending to become less important and common interest and common status are tending to become more important. This is not to be interpreted to mean that the family and the neighborhood are no longer important, but simply that they are becoming less important.

Similarly, the recreation aspects of non-recreation activities are disappearing. The recreational by-products of the economic life of the community--husking-bees, house-raisings, log-rollings, barn-raisings, quilting-bees, candle-dippings, etc.--have completely disappeared in all but the more isolated communities. Concrete evidence showing the decline in the recreational importance of the church is difficult to find, but general observation indicates that the church is much less important recreationally than it once was. The school is still important in recreation. Or perhaps we should say that it is again important. For the recreational significance of the rural school today is in the new activities that have grown up around the consolidated school, and these represent not so much the survival of the activities of the old district school as the development of new activities borrowed more or less directly from the recreational activities of urban schools. Non-recreational organizations con-

tinue to furnish an important share of the recreational opportunities of the rural community. But here also the question of the survival of rural features may be questioned since so many of the rural organizations of today--the agricultural clubs, the cooperative organizations, etc.--suggest the development of clubs and organizations, or, on the other hand, by way of adjustment to new conditions created by contact with cities. Such traditional organizations as the lodges seem to be declining in importance.

(3) The third trend noted was that toward specialization in recreation. In a sense this is simply the correlative of the preceding, the separation of recreation from other community activities may be said to be a form of specialization. But it must be noted that the mere loss of the recreational functions of economic life, and of the church and the school, is no guarantee that these functions will continue independently. A most important point to be noted is that the disappearance of traditional rural recreations and traditional organization for recreation has proceeded at a much more rapid rate than has the development of new recreations and new recreational organization.

But a beginning has been made in the development of independent recreational organization: the private recreational clubs, commercial amusements, and public recreation. It may be said that there has been little development of the first and the last of these in the rural community, although attention may be called to the development of the rural community building as a special phase of the development of public recreational facilities. But the movie and the radio have brought commercial recreation into rural life. These facilities are not yet as widespread among rural people as among city people, but they are sufficiently widespread to have become a very important factor in rural recreation.

The rural recreational situation may be characterized very briefly, then, by saying: (1) the limitations imposed by the nature of farm work are still very important, but somewhat less important than formerly; (2) there has been a very extensive loss of traditional rural recreations which have in general been characterized as by-products of other social activities; and (3) the development of independent recreational interests has lagged far behind the loss of the older forms of recreation, although the development of the radio and the motion picture theater have been very important.

THE RELATION OF

RURAL RECREATION AND URBAN RECREATION

Now it seems to me that the common denominator of these trends is a growing similarity to the recreational life of the city. Certainly the restrictions imposed on recreation by the nature of the economic life of the community are much less important in the city than in the country. It is true that the traditional hours during which city men and women work have thrown recreation into the afternoon and evening hours, and the traditional length of the working day has limited the amount of leisure. Also it may be said that the nature of urban work has been such as to direct the use of leisure toward relaxation rather than toward rest. But accepting these qualifications, it does seem that recreation in the city is relatively free from restrictions imposed by the work-life of the city. So, the suggestion that rural recreation shows a tendency to escape in some slight degree these restrictions indicates to that degree the lessening of the difference between rural and urban recreation.

Secondly, urban recreation is relatively independent of the restrictions imposed on rural recreation by virtue of the

limitation on the number of social contacts. Recreational associates are not chosen in the city on the basis of nearness, except in the case of the play-groups of the smaller children, and even here, the number of children is ordinarily sufficient to make possible differentiation on the basis of age, sex, common interests, and common likes and dislikes. In so far as the development of transportation reduces the importance of mere nearness in the formation of recreational groups, rural recreation again becomes more like urban recreation.

In the third place, recreation in the city is relatively independent of the other activities of the community. Recreation is secured, not as a by-product of some other activity, but directly as an independent activity. This characteristic difference between city and country has disappeared to a considerable degree, although the independent development of recreation has only just begun in the rural community.

I do not wish to over-emphasize the similarity between rural and urban recreation, because I am still impressed by the importance of the differences. But it does seem to me that recent trends in rural recreation indicate that the dissimilarities are disappearing and that these trends are such as to warrant the prediction that the future will see a much more extensive similarity between these two phases of culture.

Now the problem arises: Is there any causal connection between the growth of cities and the growing similarity between rural and urban recreation?

THE CONCEPT OF URBANIZATION

In a general way, the term "urbanization" implies simply a tendency for rural culture to become like urban culture. It is possible that this growing similarity is nothing more than the

chance convergence of two more or less independent cultural systems. But, on the other hand, there are so many connections between the life of the city and the life of the country that this possibility is rather remote. It is the assumption of this dissertation that the more important changes in rural recreation are closely, although for the most part indirectly, related to the culture that has thus far been characteristic only of the cities.

There are several instances of more or less direct transference of urban recreational patterns to rural communities. In connection with the consolidation of rural schools, itself an instance of direct diffusion, organized athletics, dramatic activities, school orchestras and bands, and similar activities have been introduced into the rural community. The community use of schools was of urban origin and was introduced into the rural community directly from the city. A few urban organizations have extended their activities to rural communities without any extensive modification of their programs--luncheon clubs, the Boy Scouts, the Young Men's and the Young Women's Christian Associations. In the field of commercial recreation, the motion picture and the radio are important instances of the direct diffusion of urban recreational devices to the country. Yet these several instances of direct diffusion are of secondary importance, with the exception of the motion picture and the radio, when viewed from the standpoint of the total recreational life of the rural community.

It appears that the urbanization of rural recreation is something more complex than the simple diffusion of traits of the urban culture. To understand properly the process it is necessary to refer to the essential unity of any culture. A culture does not consist simply of a sum of cultural traits, but of traits so interrelated that, taken together, they form a unity. Each trait

tends to undergo modification until it is more or less consistent with the other traits of the culture. In a static society, it is conceivable that a state of equilibrium would eventually be reached in which each trait would have reached an optimum adjustment to every other trait and in which, consequently, cultural change would cease. But so long as there is contact with another culture, the introduction of new traits and the tendency to make adjustments at the points of cultural contact precipitate long series of adaptive changes in the other traits of the culture.

The process of the urbanization of rural recreation is conceived here as being primarily in the nature of changes in rural recreation by way of adaptation to other traits in the rural culture. There are two types of changes that seem to have been important in bringing about these adaptive changes in recreation. (1) Many changes in the non-recreational departments of rural culture are the direct results of the diffusion of urban traits. The most important of these changes, so far as recreation is concerned, are associated with the substitution of factory-made products for home-made products. The substitution of kerosene for candles for illumination is the essential explanation of the disappearance of candle-dippings as a form of recreation, of blankets and other manufactured bed-clothing for quilts of the disappearance of quilting-bees and piecing bees, of sawn-lumber and other fabricated building materials for logs of the disappearance of log-rollings and house- and barn-raisings, of "store-rugs" for rag-rugs of the disappearance of sewing-bees. In other words the disappearance of many traditional forms of recreation in rural communities is to be explained not in terms of their displacement by competing urban amusements, but in terms of adjustments to other departments of rural culture which are traceable to the dif-

fusion of urban cultural traits.

(2) But other changes are due to the fact that certain forces that have been felt only in cities for many years past are now beginning to be felt in the country, with the result that changes are occurring in rural life similar to those that developed long ago in urban life. Two such forces seem to be particularly important--the multiplication of social contacts and the application of power machinery to production.

Attention has already been called to the conditioning of rural recreation by the sparsity of population, i.e., of the limitation on the number and variety of social contacts. This limitation has made association on a territorial basis particularly important and has restricted the development of specialized recreational organization. This limitation has been removed in the city because of the concentration of population. So many persons are within the area of frequent contact that it would be impossible to include every individual in one's recreational associations, with the result that there has been selection on the basis of common interest, common status, or other common characteristic. This limitation is in the process of removal in the country through the improvement of communication and transportation. Particularly through the telephone, the automobile, and the improved road is the rural dweller having his range of effective social contact extended, with the result that the limitation on specialization of recreational association is being weakened. So also, the declining importance of the family and the neighborhood and the tendency to separate recreation from the other activities of the community are due in large measure to this multiplication of social contacts.

The application of elaborate machinery, particularly that

operated by mechanical power, to the processes of production was accomplished a century or more earlier in the city than in the country. It is only just now that farm production is being seriously modified by the use of elaborate machinery and by the use of mechanical power. But as this factor is becoming more important in rural life, changes are being brought about in the country similar to these that occurred in the city. We may note several effects with particular reference to recreation. Perhaps the most important is the transition from an economy based upon the consumption of one's own produce to an economy based upon exchange. The very fact of the use of farm machinery implies production for exchange, for machinery cannot be produced on the farm--it can only be secured through the production of goods which can be exchanged for machinery. Furthermore, the use of machinery so increases the efficiency of farm labor that a considerable surplus over and above the farm family's needs is produced, the only value of which is in exchange for other products. And, as indicated, the development of an exchange economy makes possible the purchase of recreational equipment, the development of commercial recreation, and similar recreational developments, the means for which cannot be produced on the farm. The amount and the regularity of leisure has been increased somewhat through the use of machinery, although this effect is almost negligible when compared with the gains of urban workers. Perhaps more important is the lessening of fatigue, and possibly a shift in leisure needs from the need for physical rest to a need for relaxation. But again, it is easy to mistake the possibility for the reality, for it is not likely that great gains in these respects have been made yet. It is sufficient, however, to indicate that a factor, long felt in the city, is now beginning to be felt in the country, and changes

in recreation, similar to those that have characterized the development of urban recreation, are now beginning to appear in the country.

SUMMARY

By way of general summary, it may be said that many traditional rural recreations have disappeared or are disappearing; that the traditional bases for the organization of rural recreation are being modified; and that these changes are reducing the dissimilarities between rural and urban recreational culture and increasing the similarities, although the differences are still more striking than the similarities. It is probable that this growing similarity is directly related to the growth of cities, either directly through the diffusion of urban recreations, or indirectly through changes in rural recreation by way of adaptation to non-recreational traits that have been borrowed from the city and through adaptation to forces that were once peculiar to urban life but which now appear in rural life.

